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Reins Tighten On Carriers for Householders

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CPYRGHT

Uprooted Americans made important gains yesterday when the Interstate Commerce Commission decided on stiffer regulation of the carriers hauling their household belongings.

Broad new rules were issued to meet the complaints of householders, whose cries of mishandled shipments, deceptive salesmanship and unsatisfied claims outnumber all other complaints the ICC receives against carriers.

Although it took the ICC two years to uphold with modifications the recommendations of Examiner Richard S. Ries, the new rules marked a major step toward helping the consumer in the often-frustrating process of changing homes.

Here are some of the principal householder complaints and what the ICC said it would do about them:

- Householders have been kept waiting at their new homes or in hotels for overdue shipments. When the shipment arrives, the bill is higher than the estimate and the goods go into storage if the family can't pay the difference on the spot.

The ICC ruled that carriers must give 24 hours' notice by telephone or wire if there will be a delay or if the charges exceed the estimate by at least 10 per cent or \$25. Underestimates must be reported and explained to the ICC. On demand, the householder is entitled to advance notice of actual weight and charges.

- When loss or damage occurs, some householders learn that they do not have the protection they thought they had paid for. Some carriers procrastinate in settling claims.

The ICC doubled carrier liability to 60 cents per pound, gave householders an option to purchase full protection for an additional 50 cents per 100 pounds, and ruled that carriers may no longer sell insurance.

Commissioner Charles A. Webb, writing for a nearly unanimous ICC, noted that the higher liability coverage made it possible to take carriers out of the insurance business, "in which business they have not particularly distinguished themselves."

Webb held that damage and loss claims must be acknowledged in writing within 30 days and either satisfied or rejected within four months, with long-pending claims reported to the ICC.

Webb said mover agents often promise more than they can accomplish, not necessarily from unscrupulousness but frequently because of heavy competition in an industry where rates are "virtually identical."

While some complaints prove unfounded, Webb said the shipping public includes many "sporadic and unsophisticated" persons to whom "a greater responsibility is owed" than to experienced shippers. The ICC estimates that the "average" family moves every five years.

Two Commissioners said they would do away with all advance cost estimating by carriers on grounds that it produces more controversies than the service is worth.

Webb noted that both householders and carriers are to blame for many disputes that arise.